

Communion—Its Gravity and History Pastor Wilson, January 2015

I. Gravity (Seriousness)

The Bible gives us an account of the Apostle Paul rebuking the Corinthian church because they did not appreciate the seriousness of the sacrament of Communion. The Corinthians did not give due reverence, or respect to the observance of which they were taking part. The Corinthians appeared to be looking at Communion as just another time to get together and eat, drink and fellowship; and some were getting drunk and some were gorging out on food (I Corinthians 11:17-30).

Paul went on to say that the offending Corinthians were “eating and drinking damnation to themselves,” because they were partaking “unworthily” because they were not “discerning the Lord’s body.” The Corinthians were not honoring the fact that the Communion sacrament was representative of the Lord’s body and blood (NLT); they were not “recognizing” the body and the blood of Christ (ISV, HCSB); they were not “judging the body rightly” as the NAS translates it. The Corinthians did not “distinguish the body of the Lord Jehovah” as the Aramaic Bible renders the verse. The Apostle Paul went on to tell them that their callousness and carelessness regarding the Lord’s Supper had resulted in many of them being weak and sickly; and some had even died.

Now, given the seriousness of the matter that Paul indicates; let me hasten to make a point: you may have made note of the word, “unworthily” in Paul’s rebuke. There is a difference between partaking of Communion “unworthily” and someone being an unworthy person taking Communion. Understand that NONE of us are worthy of receiving ANY blessing from the Lord. Paul was not talking about our personal worthiness here. Paul was only speaking of the MANNER, and the ATTITUDE in which the Corinthians were going about taking communion. Their ATTITUDE was one of disregard and ultimately disrespect for the body and the blood of Christ, THEREFORE that made their partaking an act of unworthiness.

Let’s take a closer look at I Corinthians and point out some critical aspects. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 11:23-26 said,

I Corinthians 11:23-26

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

In studying the sacrament of Communion, allow me call your attention to four points:

1. Jesus said, “take eat; this is my body which is broken for you.” Point one: Jesus was speaking figuratively, not literally. The bread he broke and shared with the disciples was representative of his body; and did not literally become his body as some teach. However, EVEN partaking of the representation of Christ’s body is a weighty and serious matter!
2. When he took the cup, Jesus said, “This cup is the NEW TESTAMENT IN MY BLOOD. Hebrews 9:18 says that the first covenant, the first testament was sealed with the blood of calves and goats. We are partakers of a greater promise, a greater covenant, because the blood of Christ seals this “new” covenant! And since it took the blood, and death (Heb 9:16, 17) of Christ to put this covenant into effect, the communion cup, which represents the blood of Christ, is INDEED a serious matter!
3. Jesus said, “this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” The Bible ISN’T specific about how many times a year that communion should be observed. The only instruction we’re given is “as oft as ye drink it.” I’ve taken part in communion observances with the UPC for the last 35 years. I believe most, if not all of our churches perform the sacrament of communion once a year. I agree with this timing because it preserves the solemn-ness and importance of the sacrament and doesn’t allow it to become trite or trivial.
4. Lastly, Jesus said, with the taking of communion “ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” When we take communion, we are saying we believe that the Lord is coming back. The Lord IS coming back and He will be looking for a church that has washed their robes in the blood of the lamb; he’ll be looking for a church that has neither spot nor wrinkle. For this cause, the people who receive communion *should* be people who have done those things the scripture says must be done to be ready for His return. We should have repented of our sins, been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and been filled with the Holy Ghost speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance. Or, at the very least be seeking God and heading in that direction. More on this particular point later.

II. History

After 430 years of captivity to the Egyptians, God called Moses and set into motion a plan to deliver the Israelites out of their bondage. A mighty deliverance that would not only show the Israelites the awesome power of their God, but what would also be a show of God’s authority and supremacy over all of the false gods of Egypt and all the surrounding nations.

In preparation for their deliverance and leaving out from under the rule of Egypt, God commanded Moses to instruct the people in the observance of the first of an ongoing, annual celebration called the Passover. It was to be called the Passover,

because in this mighty show of God's power, all of the firstborn males of the inhabitants of Egypt were to die at the hands of the death angel—but that same death angel would “pass over” the Israelites who had obeyed God's instruction.

The ONLY way, any firstborn male in the land of Egypt could be spared the touch of the death angel was if he was observing the feast of the Passover behind closed doors which had had both side doorposts and the overhead lintel painted with the blood of the Passover lamb. The lamb, or goat was to be without blemish; a male; and no more than a year old. The lamb had to be roasted; it could not be eaten raw or boiled; and it had to be consumed completely. These were God's specifications.

A note aside: It is both interesting and critical to note that when God carried out the judgments against the Egyptians that resulted in the “salvation” of the Israelites, God left NO ROOM for any alternative avenues for the “saving” of the Israelites. Every Israelite; every proselyte; every servant, midwife and circumcised-stranger living with an Israelite family had to be “saved” the same way! It was strike lamb's blood on the doorposts and overhead lintel and eat the Passover meal, or be subject to the same judgment as the Egyptians! There was no “shaking the preacher's hand;” or signing the church roll. No “accepting the Lord” God as a personal savior, or confessing the Lord God with the mouth and believing in the heart for salvation. What am I saying? Today we have all kinds of honest, but misguided alternatives to Biblical salvation—all sorts of misconstrued, and taken-out-of-context scripture. But God's ONLY stated biblical method of salvation is repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and the infilling with the baptism of the Holy Ghost speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives the ability (Acts 2:36-38, Acts 2:1-4)!

Back to the Passover: God was ultra-specific on how he wanted the Israelites to observe *His* Passover. Along with the Passover lamb, they had to eat bread that had NO yeast, or “leaven” in it. And the Israelites had to be packed and ready to go when God commanded. Future Passovers had to be observed in the month of Abib and a non-Jew could NOT partake of the Passover unless he was a convert and had been circumcised. Those of you who know what circumcision involves might be thinking to yourselves that this particular requirement sounds a bit drastic. But again, this is not pastor Wilson's rules or requirements, they are God's, and God has the sovereign right to set any rules or requirements that He wishes!

The death angel passed through Egypt the night of the Passover and there was an excruciating amount of sorrow, wailing and anguish; because there was not a household that escaped—not even the household of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Only in the homes of the Israelites was there salvation. It was the obedience of the Israelites, and the blood upon the doorposts, that caused the death angel to Passover. After this final display of God's power and determination, Pharaoh released the Jews and Moses led them out of Egypt with the strong hand of God.

That was the history of the Passover. Now, how does this Old Testament, God-ordained Jewish feast apply to the New Testament and us? I Corinthians 5:8 says

that Jesus is *OUR* Passover lamb! I Peter 1:18, 19 says that we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, as of a “lamb without blemish and without spot:” and the precious blood of Christ is applied to the doorposts of our hearts when we obey the gospel of Jesus Christ! And like the lyrics to the old hymn, God is saying “when I see the blood, I will pass; I will pass over you!”

III. Closing thought

One last important point: in Colossians 2:11,12 Paul says that in Christ, the New Testament church is “circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.” A careful study of this passage, in conjunction with Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5 and Heb 6:1, 2 reveals that Paul equates Old Testament circumcision with New Testament baptism in Jesus name! What am I saying? Communion is the equivalent of the Old Testament Passover. So if God forbid any uncircumcised-male, or non-covenant person from participating in the Old Testament Passover, then at a minimum, New Testament communion partakers must at the very least need to have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ!

In closing, someone might be saying, “Wow, I had no idea Communion was so strident, inflexible and serious.” To which I would reply, “yes, it is;” it’s about the body and the blood of Christ; and it’s a remembrance of what he did for you and me. Yes, it is serious.